

Highlands Newspaper

MERRY CHRISTMAS!

FREE Every Thursday

Volume 16, Number 51

Real-Time News, Weather & WebCams: HighlandsInfo.com

Thursday, Dec. 19, 2019

Hospital CEO/CNO Tom Neal addresses Highlands Town Board

At the Thursday, Dec. 12 Town Board meeting, attendees got to meet and hear from newly hired CEO/CNO of Highlands

Cashiers Hospital, Thomas Neal.

Neal most recently held the position of CEO of Community Health Systems (CHS). During his

time with CHS, he served as CEO of both Berwick Hospital Center in Berwick, PA and Greenbrier

• See NEAL page 11

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New Commissioners are sworn into office



From left: Commissioners John Dotson, Brian Stiehler, new Commissioner Marc Hehn accompanied by his wife Betsy, take the oath of office at last Thursday's Town Board meeting.

Macon County Clerk of Court Vic Perry swore in the new commissioners at the Thursday, Dec. 12 Town Board meeting.

After the ceremony, each commissioner gave his thoughts about the next four years.

Newcomer Marc Hehn read from a Christmas card he sent out to voters.

"Merry Christmas! Let's continue to believe in our community and ourselves. In doing so by working together I believe we can achieve a fully staffed hospital and fully staffed medical practices on the plateau," he said. "Whenever there's a need there is an opportunity. Mr. Mayor, I look forward to working with you and all the commis-

• See COMMISSIONERS page 5

Williamsses to fund pool house renovations

An addition to the agenda which was accepted at the start of Thursday's Town Board meeting was a request from Art Williams to renovate the interior of the pool house at the Rec Park.

Recreation Director Lester Norris said the town had been approached by Williams who offered funding to renovate the interior of

• See WILLIAMSES page 5

A Duke Power update

At Thursday night's Town Board meeting, Kevin O'Donnell with NOVA Energy Consultants, Inc., who is the liaison between the town and Duke Power, had some news for commissioners that went over like a lead balloon.

"If deregulation takes hold in this state, we may not have to do this on behalf of our citizens," said

• See DUKE page 16

Highlands kids 'Shop with a Cop' for Christmas



Highlands police officers took Highlands area youth to Franklin on Saturday to "Shop with a Cop" for Christmas.

— Submitted photo

By Brian O'Shea

Highlands Police Department gave about 16 area kids a magical day of shopping for Christmas gifts, hitting up The Factory in Franklin, and then wrapping all their goodies at the Episcopal Church of the Incarnation in Highlands on Saturday through Shop with a Cop

(SWAC).

"We participate in Shop with a Cop because we enjoy spending time with the kids," said HPD Detective Andrea Holland. "When we deal with people, we may only see the bad, on this day, all we see is the good. It's nice to get away from

• See SHOP page 15

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• THE PLATEAU'S POSITION •

• MAYOR ON DUTY •

Issues on the horizon

Let me do a brief follow-up to several items covered at the last Highlands Town Board meeting. It was a unique session with the swearing in of Marc Hehn, a new commissioner, and Commissioners Buz Dotson and Brian Stiehler for their four-year term.

Kevin O'Donnell, our Nova Energy consultant, gave an update on the status of the town's Duke Energy wholesale electric contract. The contract is complicated and fluid. Kevin monitors the continuous execution of the contract to ensure our interests are represented. He challenged a charge in this year's contract that netted the town a \$64,000 refund. Refunds are applied toward operating costs to help keep rates down. For at least four years we have had no significant rate increases. That has not been the case with Duke retail customers. Kevin informed us that Duke retail customers may be facing a built-in 50% rate increase over the next decade to cover the rebuilding of Duke's electric grid. As a wholesale customer, the Town of High-



Highlands Mayor
Patrick Taylor

lands will not be a part of those rate increases.

With that said, Kevin does expect Duke to increase our wholesale rate next year. There is a rate formula in our contract with Duke that determines these increases. For several years we have not passed these increases to customers but the coming year may be different.

Coal ash fees were again brought up by Kevin. The NC Utilities Commission granted 100% of the costs Duke requested for coal ash recovery. That ruling meant higher fees for Duke customers. The NC Attorney General and the NC Utilities Public Staff filed a suit that will be heard by the NC Supreme Court. The plaintiffs contend that the NC Utilities Commission awarded Duke excessive recovery costs when compared to similar cases in nearby states. If the court rules for the plaintiffs, there's a good chance the current coal ash fees could be reduced.

In 2028 the town will have to renegotiate a contract with Duke, or find another supplier. Kevin advised us to start this process around 2025. It will be important to explore opinions concerning how and with whom to purchase electricity.

The new fire station is moving forward. The board approved a request to seek qualifications for a contractor/manager position. This position would oversee the entire building construction. The contractor/manager would call for bids from subcontractors for all building phases. The manager would consult with the town and architect in determining which subcontractors make the best bids. This type of construction management has proven to be an effective way of containing building costs.

I also appointed members of the board to working committees for next year. These committees work with staff in studying specific issues and making proposals and recommendations to the entire board. For example, we have a public safety committee, a land use committee, a finance committee and a recreation committee to name just a few. As always, I will be appreciative of all the time and work the committees will do this year.

• HIC'S VIEW •



• WEATHER •

Thu, 19-Dec	Fri, 20-Dec	Sat, 21-Dec	Sun, 22-Dec
45°F 23°F	48°F 30°F	44°F 35°F	48°F 34°F
Sunny and milder	Sun and areas of high clouds	Mostly cloudy	Times of sun and clouds
RealFeel®	RealFeel®	RealFeel®	RealFeel®
High: 51° Low: 21°	High: 52° Low: 27°	High: 47° Low: 32°	High: 46° Low: 33°

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MLS# 92131 | Was \$ 990,000 NOW \$949,000!

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MLS# 91073 | Offered for \$675,000



HIGHLANDS FALLS CC Almost brand new remodeled home in Highlands Falls Country Club (where club membership is optional). Three bedroom, 4 bath home with a lower level family room and office/bonus room with a full bath. Completely renovated in 2019 with new kitchen, appliances, bathrooms, wood floors, two stone fireplaces located in the great room and lower level family room, and covered decks on both levels.

MLS# 91190 | Offered for \$675,000



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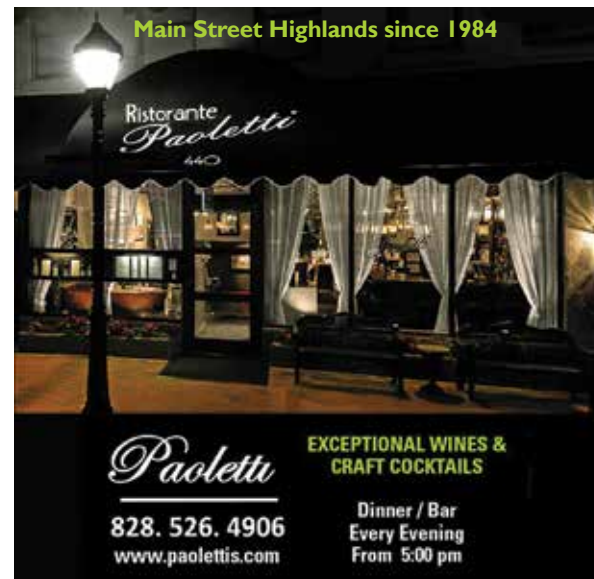
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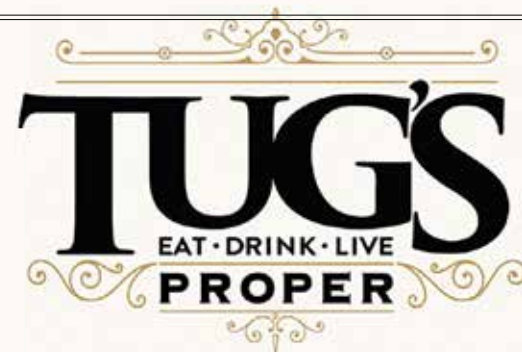


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...COMMISSIONERS continued from page 1



Mayor Pat Taylor with plaque honoring Commissioner Eric Pierson's service over the last eight years.

sioners and our staff.

Commissioner Brian Stiehler said he looks forward to another four years of working with fellow commissioners and town staff.

"You guys definitely pull the heavy weight. It's a pleasure working in focus with you and for long-range planning."

Commissioner John Dotson agreed with Stiehler.

"I'd like to say we have a fabulous town staff and crew. It's been an absolute pleasure to have worked with them over these years and I look forward to four more years and continued 'good hard works,' he said.

Mayor Taylor also commended outgoing Commissioner Eric Pierson for his hard work and commitment over the last eight years and presented him with a plaque and a gift certificate which he said is standard procedure when a commissioner leaves office.

— Kim Lewicki

...WILLIAMSES continued from page 1

the pool house including the foyer, dressing rooms, and office area.

Norris said the renovation will be extensive and will be on the same footprint.

"It will include leveling and tiling the floor, tiling walls and showers, replacing lockers, lighting, interior and exit doors, counters, sinks and repainting the ceilings in the dressing rooms," he said. "In the office area, it will encompass tiling the floor and the base of the walls — we found some rot in the wall and that will be corrected."

In addition, in the office area, a new granite countertop at the check-in station will be installed as well as new cabinets, lifeguard lockers, storage shelving and lighting, painting and the addition of a kitchenette.

Norris said he expects the work to begin in January and to take two to three months. There will be some interruptions, but he said the plan is to keep the pool open as much as possible.

"We will do one dressing room at a time and the other will be shared or the men may have to go next door," he said. "This is still a plan in process because it came up so quickly. We are still ironing out the details."

Norris requested approval by the Town Board that

• See WILLIAMSES page 17



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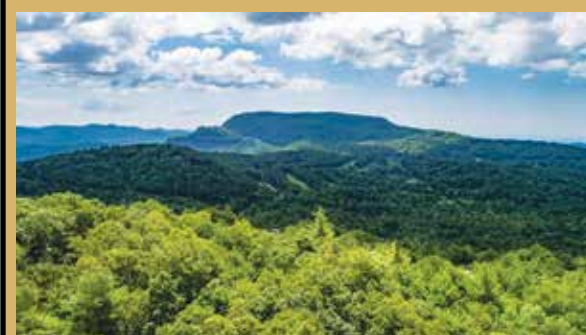
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•WORD MATTER•

Life Is, Indeed, Wonderful

Every Christmas, I attempt to recall times when the holidays were extra special. These days they seem to be about doing our part to keep America's retail sector afloat, outdoing our neighbors with elaborate decorations, and pigging out on too much of too many good things. Sometimes it's difficult to recall memories reflecting something other than excess.



Bud Katz

More than once I've invested in close-watching Frank Capra's masterpiece film, *It's a Wonderful Life*. I watched, as I now do every year, James Stewart's George Bailey come to life in glorious black and white. I watched how the filmmakers created winter in a small, upstate New York town, Bedford Falls, on a movie lot in sunny Encino, California, and I watched, mesmerized, as George and his future film wife, Mary Hatch, danced the Charleston before ending up in the swimming pool hidden under the floor of the gymnasium in Bedford Falls, but actually in Beverly Hills High School.

Christmas is often referred to as magical. Film is also magical; it's a means by which we are transported from our normal lives into worlds of fantasy, places we'd never otherwise visit, alongside both real people and fictional characters we'd likely not ever encounter in so-called real life. We, of course, meet George, an ordinary, yet extraordinary family man with a wife, four children, an old, drafty house, and a business under siege

by Henry Potter, an especially egregious adversary. George found a secret weapon, ... an Angel Second Class named Clarence Oddbody, sent down from above to help George through his difficulties and, in so doing, earn his wings.

Through film, we've met extra-terrestrials, war heroes, superheroes, cowboys, talking mice, ducks, lions, raccoons and trees, kings and queens, gods and monsters, cops and robbers, and a gazillion representations of Santa Claus, surely one of the most durable and enduring icons of the season.

It's a Wonderful Life is now considered a Christmas classic and is the subject of intense scholarly and academic study in film schools and classes in American culture. It's also, according to the Hollywood Reporter, one of the top 20 most watched films ever.

Christmas is actually a supporting player in *It's a Wonderful Life*, which, at its core, is the story of a discouraged, suicidal man who always put his own hopes and dreams aside in favor of those of others. It's also about how the life of one person can impact the lives and futures of many others.

I doubt George is a metaphor of any kind, or of anyone, in either the film or the short story, *The Greatest Gift*, by Philip Van Doren Stern, but it would be easy to draw some parallels with the life of another man associated with Christmas.

George Bailey was taught to care about

• See WORD MATTER page 9



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...WORD MATTERS continued from page 7

others growing up in a family including a doting mother and a saintly father. He surrounded himself with an odd cohort of men and a couple of women. One, Mary, was pure and chaste. She became George's wife. The other, Violet, was neither pure nor chaste, but helped George get through his ordeals. He navigated his world despite the devilish machinations of Henry Potter, a most powerful antagonist. George participated in a couple of minor miracles, but life seemed always to be stacked against him. In the end, he was prepared to surrender his own life for the benefit of his beloved family.

As things turned out, Clarence helped George realize how different the world around him would have been had George never been born. And, we know our real world would have been different but for

the birth and death of Jesus Christ.

I think it's important, during these festive times, to consider the possibility that we're all here for some purpose; perhaps, to impact the lives of others instead of focusing just on ourselves.

I plan to watch It's a Wonderful Life, in black and white of course, and I plan to enjoy as much of the season as possible right here at home, in Highlands. I plan to express gratitude for those I love, for those who love me, and for whatever good I can find in a troubled world.

I believe in the title of Capra's film. It IS a wonderful life. Heck, as the song says, It's the Most Wonderful Time of the Year. And let's not lose sight of what George Bailey learned; that every time a bell rings, an angel gets his wings. Good job, Clarence.

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• HIGHLANDS AREA EVENTS •

Ongoing

• Movies at the Playhouse
Fri & Sat 1, 4, 7; Sun. 1 & 4; Tues-
Thurs 1, 4, 7.

• Ice Skating at K-H Founders Park – Thurs. 1-8p; Fri. & Sat 1-10p; Sund. 1-5p. Closed Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Eve and Christmas Day.

The Bascom is open Friday - Monday 10am-5pm (Sundays 12pm - 5pm). Visitors are welcome to enjoy the newly updated Story Walk Trail throughout the week.

• At the Highlands Recreation Dept. pool. Public Swim Monday-Thursday 11a-7p Friday and Saturday 11a-6p and Sunday 1-6p.

• Fibber Magee's Clothing Thrift Store on Laurel Street is open Tues.-Friday 10a to 4p and on Saturday from 10a to 2p.

First Mondays

• Shortoff Baptist Church non-denominational Men's Mtg at 7p.

Mondays

• At the Rec Park, Dance2Fit classes with Tori Schmitt at 5:30pm.

Mon.-Wed.

• Hip Hop classes with Tori Schmitt 5:30-6:30.

Mon. & Thurs.

• The Joy Program at HUMC 11:30a to 1:30p. Includes a free lunch and a variety of programs and games. All seniors are welcome. For more info, call Kristy Lewis at 526-3376.

Mon. & Fri.

• Gentle Yoga at the Rec park at 9:15-10:15 a.m.. All levels welcome.

Mon., Wed., Fri.

• Heart Healthy Exercise Class Monday, Wednesday and Friday 8:30am-9:30am.

• Step Aerobics with Tina Rogers 8-9a.

Mon., Wed., Thurs.

• Pickle Ball at the Recreation Department Gym 10:30am - 1pm

Tuesdays

• FREE Community Table

Dinner at the Community Bldg. at 6p.

• The Highlands Writers Group meets Tuesday, at 3pm in the downstairs boardroom at The Bascom. Writers at all levels of proficiency are welcome. For additional information, contact Bud Katz, 828-526-3190 or budandlynn@me.com.

• The Humanist Discussion Group meets from 10:30-11:30 am in the Meeting Room at the back of the Hudson Library.

Third Tuesday

• The Macon County Poultry club meets to discuss topics related to raising backyard chickens. For more information please call 828-349-2046 or 828-369-3916.

• Highlands Area Indivisible Group meets at 5 pm in the Meeting Room at the back of the Hudson Library.

Tuesday and Thursdays

• At the Rec Park, Dance2Fit with Tori Schmitt at 7:30am.

• Exercise Class with Michelle Lane at 5:30. A combination class with many different styles of exercise at Rec Park.

Wednesdays

• At Community Bible Church, 5-5:30p - Dinner – Free (Donations Appreciated) 5:45-7p - G.R.O.W. Get Real on Wednesdays – Classes offered on money management, addiction, discovering your spiritual gifts and personality type, studying the bible, evangelism, parenting, marriage, grief, and more. All are welcome! Visit www.cbchighlands.com.

• Power Flow Yoga with Natalia Allio a certified Yoga Instructor 12-1pm and 6:30-7:30pm.

First Wednesdays

• Family Movies at the Hudson Library at 3:30pm. Call 828-526-3031 for titles.

3rd Wednesdays

• Recently released movies at Hudson Library at 2pm. Call 828-526-3031 for titles.

Wed. & Fri.

• Highlands/Cashiers Alcoholics Anonymous "Open Meetings" are for anyone who thinks they may have a drinking problem

or for anyone interested in the A.A. recovery program. Open meetings are held in Highlands @ the 1st Presbyterian Church, 471 Main St., at noon. And held six times a week in Cashiers at the Church of the Good Shepherd, Rte 107, Cashiers. For meeting times in Cashiers go to website www.aawnc80.org or call (828) 349-4357.

• Duplicate Bridge 12-4pm at Rec Park.

Thursdays

• At the Nature Center. Free. Exploration Hike 2:30pm. Visit forests, streams, and other spots across our campus, experiencing unique habitats and honing your

observation skills.

• Storytime at Hudson Library, 10:40 am. Open to the public

• NAMI Support Group for individuals dealing with mental illness and the family members of individuals dealing with these challenges from 7 – 8:15pm at First United Methodist Church Out Reach Center on West Main Street in Franklin Call Donita (828) 526-9510.

• Hip Hop classes with Tori Schmitt at 6:30-7:30 at the Rec Park.

2nd Thursdays

• Sapphire Valley Needlepoint Guild meets at the High-

'The Magic Flute' at PAC Sat., Dec. 21 ... free for children



The Highlands Performing Arts Center will present an encore performance of the MET Opera's Holiday Classic, Mozart's *The Magic Flute* on Saturday, December 21 at 1pm. Julie Taymor's (of *Lion King* fame) kaleidoscopic production returns this holiday season. The winning ensemble includes tenor Matthew Polenzani, baritone Nathan Gunn, and bass René Pape in this abridged, English-language version of Mozart's classic fable. Bring the whole family and create a new holiday tradition, there is no charge for children accompanied by an adult. A family holiday favorite you won't want to miss. Taymor's fanciful sets, costumes and puppets won rave reviews ... Like most fairy tales the magic flute is a mysterious story of good and evil. Naturally, Ms. Taymor's production makes the opera's monsters quite charming, like the puppet bears who are enchanted by Tamino's magic flute. Tickets are available online at Highlandspac.org or highlandsp Performingarts.com or at the door. 507 Chestnut Street Highlands.

Advent & Christmas Activities

AT INCARNATION

Saturday, Dec. 14th

5pm Christmas Chorale

Sunday, Dec. 22 Advent IV

10:30am Children's Chapel & Holy Eucharist

Tuesday, Dec. 24 - Christmas Eve

5:30pm Family Service in the Nave

10:15pm Carol Sing in the Nave

10:30pm Holy Eucharist in the Nave

Wednesday, Dec. 25 - Christmas Day

10:30am Holy Eucharist Chapel

Sunday, Jan. 6th - Feast of the Epiphany

10:30am Children's Chapel & Holy Eucharist

Episcopal Church of the Incarnation

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• HIGHLANDS AREA EVENTS •

lands Rec Park at 10 a.m.

3rd Thursdays

• Kidney Smart Classes in Franklin: from 4:30-6pm, Angel Medical Center, Video Conference Room, 3rd Floor, 120 Riverview St. Contact Majestic 828-369-9474.

• Highlands Town Board meeting at 7p in the Community Building on US 64 east and Poplar Street.

4th Thursday

• At the Hudson Library, Kids Zone LEGO Club. Intended primarily for kids in grades 1-5, LEGO Club allows creativity and STEM skills to develop

together as kids enjoy making LEGO creations.

Thurs., Dec 19

• At OEI's The Farm, a holiday evening with Mike Kinnebrew from 6-8 p.m. \$20 Cover charge. Doors open at 5:30 p.m. Free hot cocoa and cookies. Cash bar available.

Sat., Dec. 21

• Santa in the K-H Park on Pine Street 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.

• The magic Flute at PAC at 1 p.m. Tickets are available online at Highlandspac.org or highlandsp Performingarts.com or at the door. 507 Chestnut Street Highlands. Children free if accompa-

nied by an adult.

Sun. Dec. 22

• Fiber Sunday will take place at Cowee Textiles on Sunday from 2-5 p.m. in room 104 at The Cowee School Arts & Heritage Center located at 51 Cowee School Dr. Franklin N.C. 28734. Bring a textile project you are working on from spinning, knitting, weaving, rug hooking, baskets etc. Call or e-mail Teresa Bouchonnet at 828 349-3878 or bouchonnet@coweetextiles.com if you have any questions.

Wed., Dec. 25

• Highlands Annual Christmas Dinner presented by

H.A.N.D.S and Lakeside Restaurant 11a to 6p Christmas Day at Highlands Country Club. Adults \$50; Children under 12, \$15. Children 5 and under eat free. Proceeds benefit local nonprofits. Buffet features, turkey, ham, tenderloin, shrimp & grits and all the fixins.' plus desserts. Seating by reservation only. Call 828-526-9419.

Wed., Jan. 1

• Want to start the new year off the right way? Resolve

to meet at Founders Park at 10 a.m. on Wednesday for the 17th Annual New Year's Resolution Run/Walk. Those interested in participating simply gather at Founders Park on the corner of Pine and Fifth streets on Wednesday morning, January at the new time established last year, 10 a.m.; participants will run or walk a three-mile loop at a relaxed pace around the downtown area of Highlands, returning to the Park.

...NEAL contineud from page 1

Valley Medical Center, in Ronceverte, WV.

As CEO of Berwick Hospital Center, Tom helped to rebuild their primary care physician base and also led efforts to bring about significant improvements in patient experience scores, safety and quality outcomes.

Chief Primary Care Physician at Highlands Cashiers Hospital Dr. Patti Wheeler, who is also on the Hospital Corporation of America (HCA) board, introduced Neal and said she feels very good about him and the hospital's future with him at the helm.

"He has had a lot of experience. He is familiar with communities that are similar to ours which I think is a blessing," she said. "He is here to stay and isn't using this position to climb the ladder. That's why we are excited to have him as a part of the community. I think he is a great asset and I look forward to working with him."

Mayor Pat Taylor said Neal has a wonderful record of improving doctors and staff and creating new programs.

"I really look forward to hearing from Neal and his staff about all the plans and innovations he has in mind for our hospital," said Taylor.

Neal who began as a nurse almost 30 years ago said he got



Dr. Patti Wheeler introduced Highlands Cashiers Hospital's CEO/CNO Tom Neal at the Town Board meeting.

into healthcare because he liked taking care of people.

"I feel that being able to serve in the health care field is one of the most rewarding things you can do," he said.

He moved into the administration sector about 15 years ago when he went to Hilton Head where he served in a variety of roles.

The one that was of particular interest to the community and the hospital there was the work he did in recruiting.

"During my time there I served as business development officer. I recruited about 36 positions to that market. We did open some services – a breast health center in Bluffton, and a new medical office building," he said.

His last stop prior to coming to Highlands was at Berwick Hospital Center in Berwick, PA.

"I restored a lot of services there – they had lost seven primary care positions in the few years prior to me getting there. So that job was really about trying to restore those primary care positions. We recruited six back to the hospital and were able to really get that going."

While living in Hilton Head, he and his family vacationed in Hayesville, NC so he was glad to hear of the position in Highlands. He and his wife bought a house on Little Bear Pen.

"Being part of healthcare in a rural setting means being part of the community. I won't give plans. I am going to listen and learn first. Get to know what the needs are, who the people are and then I will come back and tell you where it is. I will assure you that recruiting doctors is one of the things we need to do. There's no question about that – what other services we can add? That's just one thing you'll have to wait and hear what I have to say," he said.

He said he has learned that there are really great people at Highlands Cashiers Hospital.

"The level of commitment, the professionalism, the dedication – is incredible. I am proud to be a part of this organization and I look forward to being part of the community for some time to come."

– Kim Lewicki



Please join us during the holidays at
First Presbyterian Church of Highlands
Sunday Worship Services at 11 a.m.

Advent Study Sunday Mornings thru Dec. 22

9:30-10:30 a.m., in the Church Library

Advent 2019

Cynthia M. Campbell's book, *Christmas in the Four Gospel Homes* is the focus of the study.

Rev. Dr. Curtis Fussell and Rev. Emily Wilmarth, facilitators

Saturday, December 21

Longest Night Service

An Ecumenical Blue Christmas

Worship Service

5 p.m.

The Blue Christmas service allows us to grieve losses, to acknowledge our pain, and to take comfort in God's abiding love and care for us.

Everyone is welcome to attend this ministry of our local churches.

Tuesday, December 24

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4:30 p.m. Musical Prelude

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ALL ABOUT BOOKS

• THE INK PENN •

A few of my favorite things



Kathy Manos Penn

As I pondered what to write about for Christmas, I mentally thumbed through previous columns on Christmas music, Christmas cats, and Christmas trips. What would it be this year? Initially, I considered favorite childhood Christmas gifts.

Spying yet another buck passing through our front yard expanded my thinking beyond Christmas gifts to thoughts of my favorite things year round—the things that inspire awe or a sense of contentment. With a nod to Richard Rodgers and Julie Andrews, here's what came to mind.

No matter that I see deer daily, I always pause as they pass through the yard. Some, like the bucks, are majestic. Others like the Bambis, as I call them, are adorable. Watching the adolescents kick up their heels and nip at each other brings a sense of joy.

Seeing a hawk take flight or land nearby is an awe-inspiring sight. Not long ago, we spotted a wild turkey strutting through the backyard. How wonderful to have

our own private nature preserve.

What would we do without our four-legged children? Whenever Banjo is snoring gently at my feet or Puddin' is purring in my lap, I can't help but smile and sigh. On chilly nights, Puddin' joins us in bed and lies tucked against my side or on my back. I try to remain still so as not to disturb that little ball of warmth. Banjo? He contentedly lies by the side of the bed, and these days, I wake him in the morning instead of vice-versa.

The first sight of bluebirds inspecting the house put up espe-

cially for them is an early spring pleasure. There seem always to be two couples vying for the right to move in, and the colorful scene is a delight.

Similarly, the sound of the Carolina wrens singing on the back deck is a sign they'll soon start readying the nest between the screened porch and the chimney. They return to that spot year after year, and we look forward to the chirping babies come summer.

When it turns cold, I'm reminded that the fire in the wood-burning stove is one of my favorite things. Unlike some fireplaces, it's not only pretty; it also puts out heat and provides cozy warmth throughout the winter.

Add a snowy day, and I'm in heaven—as long as I'm not stuck on the road. There's something indescribably peaceful about the silence experienced during a snowfall. An undisturbed yard of pure white is a sight to behold. Undisturbed, that is until we let the dog out the front door. That's a comical sight—Banjo frolicking in the snow, especially when it's deep enough to tickle his belly.

Any time of year, books top my list of favorite things. My day is not complete without reading a few chapters before I turn off the bedside lamp. Somehow, cold weather makes reading even more pleasurable, and the emails from the library alerting me that a book is waiting for me make my day.

This time of year, it's only natural that Christmas decorations make my list of favorite things: the crocheted angel tree topper, the bubble light nightlight, the colorful glass Woolworths ornaments that were my mother's, my Richie Bear from Rich's, and the two stuffed bears from Lord & Taylor's.

My list isn't lengthy. It's a list of the simple pleasures in life—the things that bring me joy. What's on your list of favorite things? Whatever it may be, I wish you and yours joy this holiday season and throughout the year.

Join us as we celebrate the birth of our Savior at

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**Christmas Eve
Worship Services**

**Family-oriented
Christmas Eve Candlelight Service**

5pm

Christmas Eve Eucharist

7pm.

A Candlelight Service of Lessons & Carols

9pm.

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Christmas Eve, Dec. 24:

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Christmas Day, Dec. 25:

St. Jude, Sapphire Valley - 10 a.m.,

New Year's Mass Schedule:

New Year's Eve, Dec. 31

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...SHOP continued from page 1

it all and just enjoy smiling and laughing. It's good for the heart."

The idea of SWAC is to take children who may have seen a different side of law enforcement or whose parents may have fallen on hard times and brighten up their Christmas.

Each child receives \$100 to purchase gifts for themselves, but they have to buy one gift for someone else. The children's names are given to law enforcement by teachers and members of the community.

Holland said the money is raised throughout the year through fundraisers and donations.

Once all the shopping was finished and the kids had spent some time jumping on trampolines at The Factory, they headed back up the mountain to the Episcopal Church to wrap up their goods.

"The Episcopal church began participating several years ago," said Holland. "They provide wrapping paper for the gifts,

coats, hats, and other items for the children. They have been instrumental in making our experiences with the kids brighter."

Holland said they took about 16 children shopping this year and last year all tolled, Macon County took about 200 kids shopping.



— Photo by Brian O'Shea



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"Welcome Christmas While We Stand, Heart to Heart and Hand to Hand..."

— Dr. Suess (from *The Grinch Who Stole Christmas*).

This week, several unique, mournful, interesting, and inspiring things occurred in Highlands.

The moon was full (called the "Cold Moon," and one of the prettiest I've ever seen); we lost a good friend to brain cancer way too early; and I watched a million late-night Christmas movies, when I wasn't watching the moon. Namely, *The Grinch* (original cartoon), *White Christmas* (my favorite), and *It's A Wonderful Life* which I saw three times because it's on 10 cable channels at the same time. You can't miss it.

All through the film, I was mesmerized by the lines in the movie and their meaning, which related well to the events of the week. I think that *It's A Wonderful Life* is as much about Real Estate as it is Christmas. Buying a home



Pat Gleeson, Owner, BIC
828-782-0472

in Bedford Falls back then was difficult because of Mr. Potter's greediness. But once the right people got involved, buying and selling in Bedford Falls became possible for all.

A healthy and thriving Bedford Falls is a lot like Highlands and Cashiers, NC. There's no better way to explain it than with a few lines from this classic movie!

George Bailey (Jimmy Stewart) had some of the best. "What is it you want Mary? You want the moon? Just say the word, and I'll throw a lasso around it and pull it down."

Highlands and Cashiers are chock-full of people, businesses, and yes Real Estate Professionals who will lasso the moon for you.

George's line to Old Man Potter as he defended the Building & Loan "My Father died a much richer man than you'll ever be." George's Dad helped people finance nice homes, but Potter took their cash and forced people to live in slums. One of my favorites is what George says to Mary when they're outside looking at the moon. Mary's robe accidentally falls off hooked on a holly bush.

George says, "You look older without your clothes on," which reminds all of us to have more fun, seek frivolity, and head outside to see the moon (you never know what else you'll witness).

Then there's George's Guardian Angel Clarence, who rescued George from his suicide attempt and tells us "No man is a failure who has friends," and "Each man's life touches so many other lives," and the defining line of the entire movie "You see George, you've really had A Wonderful Life."

Cue the tears please, because I'm so thankful for my friends. Highlands is the friendliest place in the U.S. (besides Bedford Falls). Listen to the bells in downtown Highlands this week and remember what Clarence said, "Every time a bell rings, an Angel gets his wings." (God's Speed Mal).

In closing, some of you may be deciding. You've been dreaming, considering, deliberating, or procrastinating about investing in property in Highlands or Cashiers. Remember what a neighbor yelled to George and Mary that night in the street, "Why don't you kiss her, instead of talking her to death." ... a lesson for all of us!

Merry Christmas! Remember, the next full Moon is January 10th!

• *Pat Gleeson, his wife Bee, and their dog Gemma are Owners and Brokers of White Oak Realty Group, in downtown Highlands (4th Street across from the Old Edwards Inn). White Oak Realty Group, founded in 2009 by Susie deVillie, is one of the leading boutique brokerage firms on the Highlands-Cashiers Plateau. You can reach Pat, Bee, Christal, Tom, and Susie at 828.526.8118.*

...DUKE continued from page 1

O'Donnell, referring to arbitrating with Duke for the lowest rates possible. "We may just let them shop the market themselves. I prefer that. I think the choice needs to be in the hands of the citizens. What started and was snuffed out 18-20 years ago has come full circle and I do believe some time in the next 10 years you will have retail de-regulation in states and you may not have to buy power on behalf

of the town's citizens by that time. Individual homeowners could do it. There are 16 states that are allowing and doing that right now and given that Duke's rates are getting way out of focus relative to the market, you are going to see more states allowing customers to do that."

That scenario, though likely good for consumers, could se-

• See DUKE page 20



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...WILLIAMSES continued from page 5

night as Williams wanted the money allocated by the end of the year.

"We need to send the Williams Foundation a request for the donation in the amount of \$232,127.50, before the end of the year for tax purposes," he said.

This adds another to the long list of donations Art and Angela Williams have

made to the town's Recreation Department including funding for K-H Founders Park, the ice rink, the town's ball field, renovations to the interior of the civic building as well as the covered pool, to name a few.

Commissioners unanimously accepted the donation.

— Kim Lewicki



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• SPIRITUALLY SPEAKING •

What does Einstein have to do with Christmas?

By Dr. Gary Hewins
Senior Pastor
Community Bible Church

Christmas is many things to many people and seemingly nothing to many others. Whatever your perspective, you have to admit that the holiday season is typically a time to connect more with others, look at one another face-to-face, enjoy a meal together and exchange gifts. Christmas, aside from any faith component, is a holiday where people tend to care for one another more and care about other matters less.

The purpose of Christmas hasn't changed but I think our world has changed drastically. Without realizing it, we have slowly and subtly morphed into a culture that is far less "Christ-masy" or holiday-minded. We now connect more using technology and connect less on a personal, intimate basis. Albert Einstein said the following in April of 1946:

"I fear the day that technology will surpass our human interaction. The world will have a generation of idiots. I believe that the abominable deterioration of ethical standards stems primarily from the mechanization and depersonalization of our lives---a disastrous by product of science and technology. Nostra Culpa (we are to blame)."

What did this man see in the spring of 1946 that remotely compares to technology in 2019? There is a great prophetic truth in Albert's assertion. We remain frenetic, hurried and we seem to think that technology will create for us more time to do other things, but it does not. It didn't do so in 1946 and it won't come close in 2019 and it may be even more tragic 30 years from now.

We have to become far more intentional about the way we approach life and intimacy, otherwise communication will be so diluted and endangered that we will only be able to relate through text rather than embrace or laugh together.

Here is a reminder, God loves you and He intentionally sent His Son to live in this world as your representative. This advent of Christ is actually a wonderful adventure. He doesn't want to text you "lol" he wants to hear you laugh as he gives you cause to laugh. He isn't so interested in sending you an emoji face, He has a greater interest in seeing you seek His face. He made the birds in such a way that they themselves "tweet." He loves you, and more than that, he demonstrated that love on your behalf.

As this world pulls on you to objectify others, keep empathy alive. As this world wallows in polarity and divisiveness, crave unity and collaboration. Enjoy your Christmas in December but keep it in your heart throughout the winter. Love others.

Write a hand-written letter. Knock on someone's door, share a cup of tea. Look into another's eyes. Touch someone's heart. Give something of you to them. It's Christmas! Be personal for God is personal. Be generous as God is generous. Be gracious as he is gracious. It's Christmas! Connect. Share. Laugh. Enjoy. Feast. And do it in person wherever possible! Merry Christmas.

"Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger."

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: "Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!" (Luke 2:10-14)

Proverbs 3:5

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Wednesdays – Supper at 6 p.m.

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Sr. Pastor Gary Hewins
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10:45am: Child. Program, 10:45am: Worship
Wed.: 5pm Dinner (\$7 adult, \$2 child), 6pm CBC U.

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Sun.; Tues: Community Supper 5:30 followed by Bible Study.

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Holy Eucharist Rite I; 9 am Sunday School; 10:30 am Holy
Eucharist Rite II. Childcare available at 10:30

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828-526-4153 • www.fbchighlands.org
Dr. Mark Ford, Pastor • 220 Main Street, Highlands
Sun.: Worship 10:45 am; Sun.: Bible Study 9:30 am
Wed.: Men's Bible Study 8:30 am; Choir 5p; Prayer Mtg 6:15p

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Curtis Fussell & Emily Wilmarth, pastors
526-3175 • fpchighlands.org
Sun.: Worship 8:30a Adult Ed.: 9:30a.m.; Worship 11 a.m.
Mondays: Men's Prayer Group & Breakfast 8 a.m.
Wed: Choir: 6p

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Wed. Kidsquest 6p.; Worship 7p.

HIGHLANDS ASSEMBLY OF GOD
Randy Reed, Pastor 828-421-9172 • 165 S. Sixth Street
Sundays: Worship: 11

HIGHLANDS CENTRAL BAPTIST CHURCH
Pastor Dan Robinson
670 N. 4th Street (next to the Highlands Civic Center)
Sun.: Bible Study 10a; Morning Worship 10:45a., Evening Worship,
6p. Wednesday: Prayer Service, 6:30 p.

HIGHLANDS UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
Pastor Randy Lucas 526-3376
Sun: School 9:45a.; Worship 9:09, 10:50.; Youth 5:30 p.
Wed: Supper: 5:15; youth, & adults activities: 6; Handbell
rehearsal, 6:15; Choir Rehearsal 7. (nursery provided); 7pm
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Wed: Bible Study and Youth Mtg.: 7 p.m.

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Mass: Thurs. 12:10; Fri. 9am; Sun: 11 a.m.

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Rev. Marty Kilby
Sundays: School – 10 a.m.; Worship – 11 a.m. & 7
Wednesdays: Prayer Mtg.: 7 p.m.

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290 Buck Knob Road; Pastor Donald G. Bates • 526-3212
Sun.: School: 10 a.m.; Worship: 10:45 a.m.; Worship: 6 p.m.

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Pastor Rev. Andy Cloer
Sundays: School: 10 a.m.; Worship: 11 a.m.
Wednesdays: Prayer & Bible Study: 6 p.m.

ST. JUDE'S CATHOLIC CHURCH
Mass: Thurs. 9am, Fri., 11am; Sun. 9am

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85 Sierra Drive, Franklin • uufranklin.org
Sunday Worship - 11 a.m.

WHITESIDE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
Rev. Sam Forrester/Cashiers
Sunday School: 10 am, Worship Service: 11 am

• POLICE & FIRE REPORTS •

Highlands Police entries from Nov. 29. Only the names of persons arrested, issued a Class-3 misdemeanor or public officials have been used.

Nov. 29

• At 11:39 a.m., officers received a report of an elderly female trespassing on the Mountain Findings property.

• At 4:30 p.m., officers received a report of a vehicle being taken without permission from a location on S 4th and Spring Street.

Dec. 1

• At 11:48 p.m., officers received a report of destruction of property on Main Street where someone damaged the front tires of a vehicle.

Dec. 2

• At 1 p.m., officers responded to a one-vehicle accident. The vehicle had been moved before the police got there

Dec. 6

• At 1:20 p.m., officers responded to a one-vehicle accident on 5th Street.

The Highlands Fire & Rescue log from Dec. 10.

Dec. 10

• At 7:40 a.m., the dept. was first-responders to a location on Memorial Park Drive.

Dec. 12

• At 12:58 p.m., the dept. responded to a Co2 alarm at a residence on E. Wingina Place.

• At 1:21 p.m., the dept. was first-responders to a location on Pierson Drive.

Dec. 15

• At 12:18 p.m., the dept. was first-responders to a residence on Clubhouse Trail.

Dec. 16

• At 5:56 p.m., the dept. responded to a motor vehicle accident on NC 106.



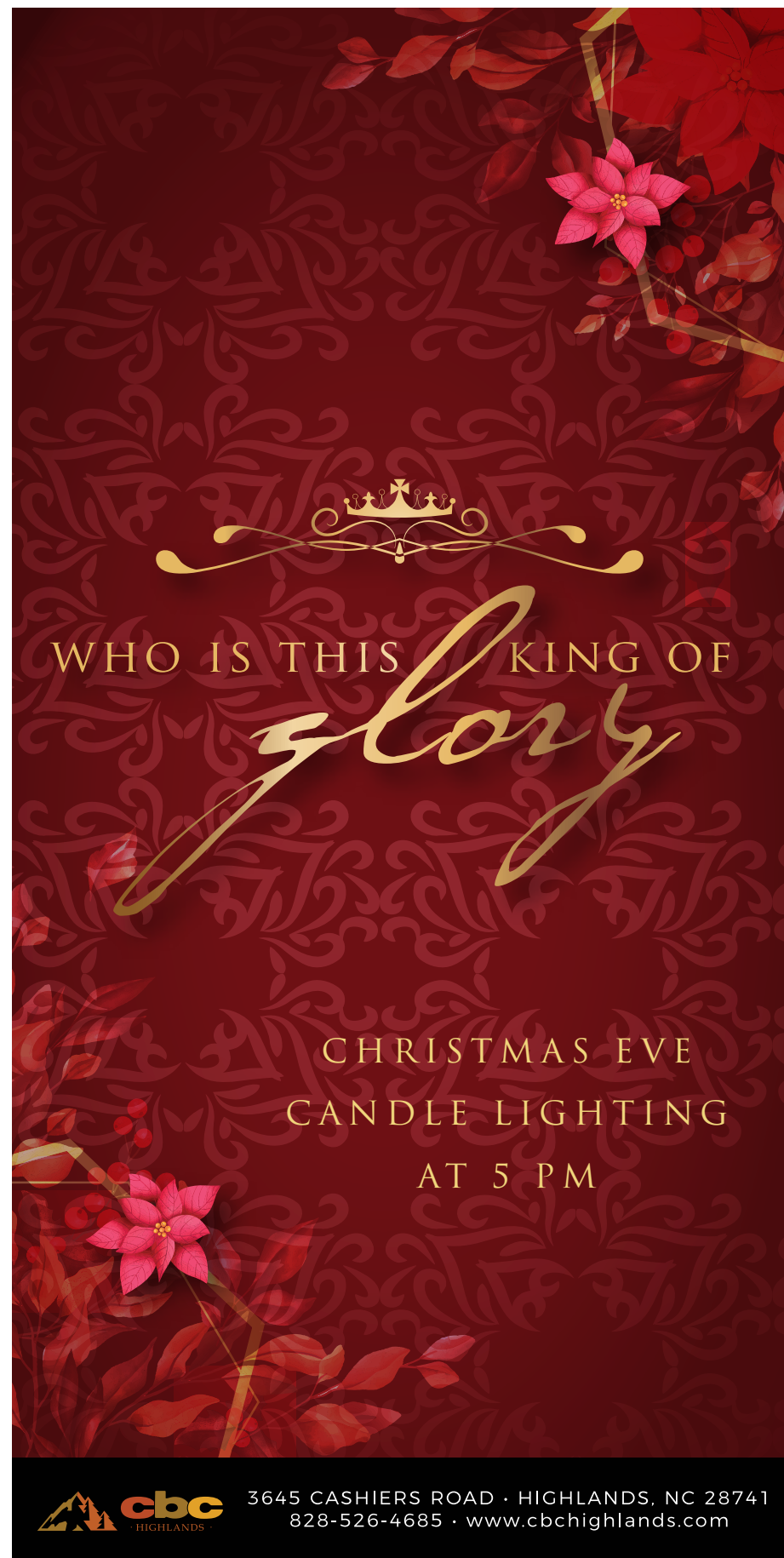
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FULL-TIME TEMPORARY MARKETING POSITION. OEI is seeking a marketing professional and graphic designer experienced in page layout and ad creation for both print and digital to fill a six-month position between approximately March 1 and September 31, 2020. At least two years of professional layout and design required. This position designs billboards, newspaper and magazine ads, digital ads and more for a high-end luxury brand. Some experience in website updating—or ability to learn—required (content management, not coding). Must have high integrity, sense of humor, consistently positive nature, interpersonal skills and work well as part of a close team. Position is 100% onsite in Highlands, NC, no exceptions. There is a possibility that this position could become permanent. Please provide cover letter, resume and samples. References will be required.

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...DUKE continued from page 16

verely cripple Highlands' bottom line since profits from its electric enterprise fund pays for much of Highlands capital outlay needs and more.

But the possibility of Highlands getting out of the electric business is years away. The town's contract with Duke is up in 2028 and no one knows if North Carolina will deregulate retail power. But, O'Donnell said in 2028 the town can either negotiate with Duke for lower prices or buy wholesale


power from another company.

According to O'Donnell there are market opportunities if Highlands decides to make a move. He suggested beginning to shop for power in five years at which point Duke will likely try to entice with lower rates.

"There are several municipalities and universities who have bought power on the open market and they wouldn't have done that if the costs weren't lower," said O'Donnell.

Namely, Kings Mountain, Concord, Black Creek,

• See DUKE page 21

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...DUKE continued from page 20

Lucama, Stantonsburg, Sharpsburg, New River Light and Power (App State), Western Carolina University and United EMC have all left Duke.

"Duke will try to offer a contract ahead of termination of the current contract to try to get us lower rates and lock us in on a long-term basis. At that point, we will do the economic analysis and come back and tell you whether it's in the town's best interest to stay with Duke," said O'Donnell. "Fayetteville recently renegotiated with Duke and saved a

• See DUKE page 22

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"It came without ribbons, it came without tags, it came without packages, boxes, or bags. Maybe Christmas doesn't come from a store. Maybe Christmas means a little bit more."
— How the Grinch Stole Christmas, by Dr. Seuss

...DUKE continued from page 21

lot of money according to press reports."

O'Donnell was at the meeting to update commissioners on Duke's position and to announce the possibility of rate hikes in 2020 but he offered a lot more information.

"We will have a rate hike from Duke in 2020. The exact amount will be known in the next several days. Once we get the final wholesale rate forecast from Duke, NOVA will work with town staff to examine whether a retail rate increase is needed," he said.

Highlands' wholesale contract costs are tied to Duke's coal ash cleanup efforts and to whatever the NC Utilities Commission decides concerning Duke's requests and responsibility. So far, the NC Utilities Commission (NCUC) has sided with Duke and allowed basically whatever it wants concerning costs.

"The NCUC decided to give Duke 100% coal ash cost recovery,

even though the NC coal ash law is more stringent than the federal rule," said O'Donnell. "NC Public Staff and the Attorney General appealed the case to NC Supreme Court. Oral arguments are set for some time in April. It's possible our rates could go down with an order from the NC Supreme Court."

He said there are two components to the wholesale bill – demand and energy. O'Donnell said Duke's demand rate is going to go up because it is in the process of replacing their coal generating plants.

"The good news is the energy costs will go down due to natural gas prices," said O'Donnell.

Evidently, natural gas prices fell to the floor this past summer. In Pennsylvania and the Marcellus area fracking has occurred so now the U.S. is competing with Saudi Arabia as number one in the production of oil.

"In the Marcellus area they

are still trying to get the oil out and one of the byproducts is natural gas. There is so much in some places they are actually flaring the gas because they are really going after the oil. Gas is a byproduct. We want the natural gas, but there's not enough pipeline in the Marcellus area to get the gas out. As a result, natural gas prices have gone down and that will help offset the demand rate increase from Duke," he said.

O'Donnell said Duke's rates are going up and it will be filing cases to increase rates by 10% every two years for the next 10 years. So, its retail rates will be looking at a 50% increase over the next 10 years.

Mayor Pat Taylor said Highlands' rates have been "pretty flat" over the last several years because Highlands is a wholesale customer so it's immune from retail rate increases.

– Kim Lewicki

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